

There are far too many of my colleagues who have had this experience—who have watched as news of school violence spread across our country. This week's tragedy was in Virginia, but it is obviously of nationwide concern.

Thirty-two lives, most of them young and from the best and brightest in our society, ended Monday by savage violence. Last year, one lost life in Bailey; thirteen lives lost in 1999 at Columbine in Littleton; and there are others lost around this Nation, and around the world, in similar tragedies: Dawson College in Montréal, Gutenberg School in Erfurt, Germany.

These are wounds, scars, that will not be removed, and for those who bear the worst of this burden my wife and I offer all our compassion, our sympathy and our prayers.

Our Nation continues to grieve with the families and friends of those killed and the injured students and teachers. Although we know exhaustive details of what happened at Columbine, and are learning more from Blacksburg, we are still attempting to understand why. People are trying to cope with the terror that keeps thrusting itself into our lives. It has become obvious at this point that there are no easy answers. We need to examine the problems facing our youth, but it is critical that we take time to carefully consider the solutions being offered.

In the coming months there will be time, and there will be a need, for us to commit ourselves to finding a way to attempt to prevent this from happening again. We must ask ourselves how this could happen, and what can be done to prevent it. There is, I am sure, no simple solution. But we must pledge ourselves to doing what we can. After Columbine, the Nation took a serious look at school safety. But Bailey—and the murders in Pennsylvania last year at Nickel Mines Amish School—showed us that it is not always troubled students. Virginia Tech showed us it is not just grade schools or high schools. We need to think about ways to provide a better, more secure future.

Watching the aftermath in Blacksburg, I am reminded of the healing Colorado undertook 8 Aprils ago. I remember the memorial service held the weekend after the Columbine murders. Tens of thousands of people attended the memorial service. Among those gathered in sorrow, Joan and I witnessed a strong belief in God. We prayed together and searched for answers. I hope the students, faculty and families of Virginia Tech can find their way to face this terrible time.

Again, I offer my deepest sympathy to those who are suffering. And I want to let my colleagues from Virginia, and their constituents, know the people of Colorado will be thinking of you today as we mark the eighth anniversary of Columbine.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is now closed.

AMERICA COMPETES ACT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to consideration of S. 761, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 761) to invest in innovation and education to improve the competitiveness of the United States in the global economy.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, sometime last year, word was received that Senators Bingaman and Alexander had an idea. The idea was to do something about our country's educational slide the wrong way. I spoke to them on several occasions. They wanted to see what we could do to increase our competitiveness internationally. Their suggestion was, first, let's do a study and find out how bad it is; is it as bad as we think it is. These two fine Senators got other Senators to join with them in the idea. They received a study from the National Academy of Sciences to find out where we were internationally with our science programs. The information was not good. As a result of that, we have the legislation now before the Senate.

This legislation is not the know-all and cure-all, but it is certainly a major step forward, if we can do this, and there is no reason we cannot.

I am happy and pleased to speak about the America COMPETES legislation. America COMPETES comes from the words "creating opportunities to meaningfully promote excellence in technology, education, and science," COMPETES. This is something we should do and are doing on a bipartisan basis. The bill is sponsored by both leaders and 50 Senators. That is a step in the right direction. Frankly, this is the way we used to do legislation here. There was so much that was done on a bipartisan basis. If we are able to complete this legislation, it will allow us to move forward on other meaningful legislation dealing with this subject generally.

The bill is the result clearly of a truly bipartisan effort. This legislation has been in the making for 2 years. I said last year. Time flies by. It was the year before last that these two Senators came to me to talk about this

subject. They asked the National Academy to make recommendations on steps we should take as a nation to maintain our competitive advantage. The result was the Augustine report, "Rising Above the Gathering Storm." The report warned that the Nation's traditional advantages are eroding at a time when many other nations are gathering strength and that decisive action is needed now.

We faced a challenge such as this before, one that occurred when I was in high school. In 1957, when the Soviets launched Sputnik, there was panic and concern. That panic and concern came about from our inability to do what they were doing to maintain our technological superiority. The Soviet Union clearly was ahead of us. Our great country responded to these threats quickly. The following year Congress passed, on a bipartisan basis, the National Defense Education Act, the sole purpose of which was to keep the United States ahead of the Soviet Union, to increase investment in math and science education. As a result of that bipartisan legislation, our country trained a whole new generation of engineers and scientists and ensured our preeminence in technology innovation for a generation.

The fact is, Federal investment in the basic sciences and research has long been a critical component of America's competitive dominance globally. Some economists have estimated that more than half of the country's economic growth since World War II has been a result of that technological innovation and dominance. Today, sadly, our position of dominance has been lost. We can debate where we are, but our dominance is not there—strong, of course, but dominant, no. We are challenged by emerging countries such as India and China where national investment in basic research, math, and science education continues to grow at a far greater pace than in the United States.

The Augustine panel cited many examples, but some statistics are striking. Consider that in 2005, more than 600,000 engineers graduated from institutions of higher education in China, 600,000; 350,000 in India; in the United States, 70,000—70,000 in the United States, 600,000 in China, and 350,000 in India. We can't keep up at that rate. China's population is more than the United States, of course, yet they graduate eight times the number of engineers even though they are only three times larger than the United States. The report also found that American 12th graders, seniors in high school, performed below the national average for 21 countries on a general knowledge of math and science.

Another study cited in the report had American 15-year-olds rank 24th out of 40 countries on a math assessment. I am embarrassed to tell the Senate and everyone within the sound of my voice Nevada students ranked 43rd out of 50 States in the Nation on math assessment.